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This issue of *Report* contains a sampling of stories received from women in three Mennonite congregations invited to participate in the project's pilot phase. We have changed the names of persons and places to protect the writers' confidentiality.

## Sharing Our Stories

Last year the MCC Committee on Women's Concerns launched a project to collect stories from women on a range of topics relating to women's social roles and sexuality in the broadest sense. We hoped to hear what the dynamics of family planning, childbearing and child rearing have meant in our lives, and how community and church have related to our experiences. We also wanted to hear from single women what it means to be single and/or celibate in a society so geared to family and so prone to view marriage and children as the norm for women.

The project arose out of a search for a response to the abortion issue. Several MCC boards, including MCC Canada and U.S. Peace Section, have passed statements affirming the sanctity of life in relation to abortion and calling for a service response to women faced with unplanned pregnancies. The Committee on Women's Concerns wanted to help in the search for appropriate responses by learning more about the context in which abortion takes place and discovering some of the reasons why women seek abortions. The project broadened when we realized that abortion is only one aspect of larger questions revolving around women's social roles and sexuality. Our hope is that the stories we collect will be useful to church people who are grappling not only with abortion, but also with other current issues of particular concern to women, such as childcare, women in the workplace, singleness, family violence and men's changing roles in family life. Perhaps women's stories will guide concerned people to sensitive and caring responses. We anticipate using the stories in a variety of ways, perhaps to create dramas, videotapes, slide shows and/or Sunday school materials, or to write articles.

You will not find these stories easy to read. Some of the women have shared or their innermost selves for the first time. Their stories are frank disclosures of the events and decisions that have molded their lives. They speak of pain, of regrets, of indecision, of hurt, of fears. The stories reflect both the idealism and the human frailty that is our common experience. Our hope is that these stories will evoke in you a non-judgmental response of compassion and understanding. While we may not endorse all the decisions made or the views presented in these stories, we do think it is vitally important to be open to hear what women have experienced, in order that we may, as the writer of Galatians 6:2 charges us, "help carry one another's burdens."

When we first read these stories we found them moving and disturbing, and we were glad to have one another to discuss them with. We encourage you, too, to find someone to process these narratives with, as you seek to understand and respond to them. We also hope that you will think about your own unique story and consider sharing it with us. As an insert to this newsletter you will find a flier describing the project more fully.

We regret that space did not permit us to include in this issue any stories from women living in the impoverished communities—both in North America and the Third World—in which MCCers are serving. We do intend, however, to include in our project stories from women in these communities. By learning of their special needs and situations, we seek to promote sisterhood with them and also to gain information and insight useful to MCC in its programming related to family planning and family welfare. —Gwen Groff and Emily Will.

Gwen Groff is currently assisting the Committee on Women's Concerns with various projects as she awaits more permanent assignment with MCC. A Lancaster County native, Gwen has had a variety of work experiences as writer/editor and businesswoman. She attends Community Mennonite Church of Lancaster, Pa. Emily Will works at women's concerns in MCC's U.S. Peace Section. She and her husband, Mark, and two sons reside in Akron, Pa., where they participate in Pilgrims Mennonite Fellowship.

**"Praying and demanding a child seemed wrong and presumptuous of me. My body just wasn't working for me."**



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## Ambivalent

I always thought I wanted to be married but was really "ready" at age 26 when I met Steven. It was a very easy decision for me, and I have never wished to be married to someone else. Sometimes—seldom—I've wished to be single again.

My mother had a line about "when you're married and have children..." that I came to resent and fear before I was married. What if no one wanted me? What if I couldn't live up to his expectations? My mother stopped talking that way when I said I didn't like it. And it wasn't only my mother; it was from elsewhere and from within.

We joked about my wanting 12 kids. I have four siblings, and Steven has two. He thought two or three would be enough. Before we were married, I got the pill from a university health center with no questions or follow-up. Then I became allergic to the pill, so my doctor fitted me for a diaphragm which I never liked but used faithfully. We weren't ready to become pregnant. When I was about 32, we decided it was time. I was excited although I had some problems feeling secure about being a mother. I did some counseling with a woman who helped me understand I was afraid of having most of the responsibility for children's care and upbringing. My mother had a lot of responsibility for us, and I still carried wounds from how much she seemed to resent it. I also realized then that I had never wanted children, even as a child. Steven was very constant and clear that he wanted children; he's never wavered. I decided the unknown of how children would affect me wasn't enough reason to refuse to have them. Also, I thought I would enjoy nursing and being pregnant—an experience that most women have. I had never considered that I may never have children.

I stopped using the diaphragm after I was sure Steven would be co-parent faithfully, and I would enjoy parenting with him. (I've always believed he would be a wonderful father.) Our family doctor put me on medication to stimulate ovulation. He referred me to a good gynecologist who was very kind—I never felt abused or "looked at." But he didn't pay much attention to my feelings. Some days I'd come home from a doctor's appointment in tears because I didn't like him poking at my body and patiently trying to be helpful. It was humiliating and discouraging.

I finally realized I had a lot of anger. Why didn't the doctors know more? Why couldn't the solutions be more clear? If it were men who couldn't get pregnant, I bet they'd be further ahead.

But I wasn't really angry at the medical profession. Medicine doesn't make miracles—it's only a tool. I thought about being angry at God for withholding a gift of a child but decided that wasn't right. Somehow that felt misdirected and foolish and the only result I could be sure of was harm to my spirit. I was able to believe God creates and gives life but does not withhold it. God doesn't have that much "say" in who gets pregnant and who doesn't. Praying and demanding a child seemed wrong and presumptuous of me. God wasn't punishing me. Steven's sperm count was fine, and we were compatible. My body just wasn't working for me.

It was very difficult for me to admit my body was letting me down. I like to be in control of everything, and I'd always felt secure that even when I couldn't control my environment, I could control my body. I had final say about who had access to my body and how much. And now I couldn't even control my body.

I got into a routine of keeping morning basal temperature, going to the doctor monthly and being disappointed every time I had my period. I was surprised at how carefully I watched the chart and learned to monitor my body.

About two years ago the doctor did a laparoscopy. It was outpatient surgery and very easy. Steven cared for me very protectively, even though I was determined I wasn't sick. I told very few people about the surgery. The doctor told me I had endometriosis and gave me expensive (\$150/month) medicine to stop all systems: no ovulation, no period, nothing. For the first three months or so, I felt lost because I didn't have a period. I actually missed it, which surprised me because I had always resented it. It was like being without an anchor.

I had talked with my mother and sister-in-law about surgery and the possibility of the heavy-duty medication a few months earlier. Nancy, my older sister-in-law, was also unable to get pregnant and had come to terms with no children. The waiting and doctor appointments wore her out. She told me she hadn't cried about it for two years. I still cried at least monthly. It was difficult for me to talk with people about it. Nancy was kind, listened a lot and didn't have advice. My mother thought I should go ahead with anything, no matter what the expense. I felt she didn't understand my feelings at all. I wasn't angry: I just didn't feel understood by her.

**"Now when people ask if we have kids my response is, 'Not yet, but we'd like to some day,' rather than a curt 'No' and an uncomfortable silence."**

Steven always listened when I was discouraged, sad and in pain. He held me and tried to understand, and I appreciated his effort. He was doing what he could, and I couldn't think of what more he could do. I often felt I was grieving for someone who had died. My hope and best efforts weren't fixing it. But Steven couldn't fix it either. If he could have, he would have. I often felt very alone but never abandoned or unloved.

This summer Steven suggested that I should tell more people about the pain and trauma, even if only in a matter-of-fact way. The truth would feel better than the quiet deception of not saying anything. Now when people ask if we have kids my response is, "Not yet, but we'd like them some day," rather than a curt "No," an uncomfortable silence, and my resentment and anger for their expectation that we should have kids. I told my family of my pain and sadness without crying. They listened carefully, and I felt they understood and cared for me. I had a second laparoscopy two years after the first (this past fall). The doctor said the endometriosis seemed cleared up, and he recommended I continue to take medication to stimulate ovulation. I was relieved with the report. Before, I had a lot of anxiety about what they would find and what I would need to do or be expected to do next. But when I found that everything was OK, I no longer felt flawed.

In the last two months, I have shifted to accept that we won't ever have children. I fear getting too comfortable because we're still trying, and we both would be glad for children. I feel ready for the challenge. I'm committed to negotiated, shared parenting with Steven and to recognizing his feelings and needs and honoring them as well as my own.

I have felt apologetic to both of our parents. They both would like grandchildren and would be great grandparents. But they have really backed off of any kind of pressure or expectation—probably because they know we want children and are frustrated too. I have appreciated their patience and support. I know it's there even though they don't speak of it much.

No one at church has said much to us. We have told only a few people of our pain and our intentions. One of the most common comments is, "Oh, you would make such good parents." Well, that's not so hard to believe, but it doesn't make it easier.

I still have ambivalent feelings; I usually do about most things. I have felt a kind of helplessness and hopelessness that's not overwhelming, but constant. I believe it's because

of the uncertainty and inability to do what I want. So I'll live with it for a while yet, keep trying, and maybe get pregnant. Then I'll talk seriously with Steven again about using birth control. But that's in the future. I've become more patient. I can wait and remain sane. I've learned about disability and tragedy—that sometimes our best efforts and our gifts from God don't make everything all right but God is still with us, and we still have value. ■

## Decided

When Marv and I were dating, we realized that both of us felt the same way: We did not want to have children. We married, and in our second year we again talked about children. Neither of us had had a change of heart. In our third year of marriage, we decided that we would go for a year acting as though we had made a permanent decision not to have children. At the conclusion of that time, we made the decision permanently—Marv had a vasectomy.

There are many background reasons for our decision. When I grew up, it was expected that married women would have children. I am the oldest in my family; childbirth was a regular event for our family. Being the only girl, I spent many hours taking care of my younger siblings. I was an outdoors person, and when I reached adolescence I despised everything that went along with becoming a woman, swelling breasts, menstrual cycles, being submissive to men and having children. I remember arguing with a friend when she would try to impress on me what a privilege it would be to have a baby. I wanted to be a masculine, tough, strong person, able to keep up with any man. Having babies just did not fit into that picture.

My husband was the youngest in his family. He never had any babies around him: no nephews, nieces or cousins. He grew up ignorant of the ins and outs of raising children. He decided early in his life that he did not want children.

By the time we got married, we both felt called to consider mission work. While we realized that children could be great bridge builders, we did not want to dilute our abilities to serve by having made children a priority. We both like to concentrate on the task at hand. We find it hard to have our energies split into several main areas of commitment.

The longer we are married, the more we realize that a healthy marriage generates energy and love. Most people choose to turn this energy inward toward their children.

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We found ourselves drawing single people into our relationship and forming family with them. They are free to stop in at our house any time. While we may not always stop what we are doing, we welcome them and let them help themselves to whatever they need.

We have found this lifestyle of openness to be fulfilling, and our friends have affirmed us for it. We entertain a lot of church and community people; if we were to have a baby, we would have to cut down the number of people we could invite in.

It was with some of our "family friends" that we first talked about not having children. Their reactions varied. One person wanted us to have children because she wanted to take care of someone who was a part of us. Others were quite supportive of the idea after we explained our reasons.

Other people warned us of the dangers of trying to make this decision while we are in our 20's. They told us that the desire to have children grows stronger when people reach their 30's.

So we had much to reflect on in that year that we "pretended" the decision was already made. Marv remained unmoved while I wavered quite a bit. In essence, the decision was mine. Marv would have considered children if I really wanted them, but he preferred not to have them. I knew much of the child care would be my responsibility. I did not want to commit myself to that. I have other gifts which are more developed than the gifts of child care. I was not sure I would make a good mother.

The hardest part of the decision was closing the door on the reality of children and living with the resulting mysteries. Would we have had a boy or girl first? What would their personalities have been like? How would they have combined Marv and me into one person?

Finally, I realized that whatever I chose, I was making a positive choice. To not have children meant that I would use the energy of our love and the capacity to nurture and teach on people other than on our own flesh and blood. That was the direction I wanted to go. Marv had the vasectomy because he was always more sure than I that he did not want children. That allows me to have children in the event I would remarry.

At present, we are happy to be living without the fear of an unexpected pregnancy. We are content to be family to our single friends who have become our intimates.

Right now, our friends and siblings aren't having children. When they do, I hope they will share them with us. Children are a sign of hope in this world, and we need to hold them close from time to time. Children need significant adults other than their parents in their lives. Perhaps Marv and I can be those adults at times. By saying no to children, we have not said no to God's will for our lives. We have prayed, sought the counsel of others, and listened to our hearts. Now we are free to follow God as He continues to lead us. ■

## Sheltered

I am a 23-year-old single Christian. I've been going to church every Sunday and often on weekdays for as long as I can remember. My grandmother and parents were strong in the Lord. My father was a minister. I grew up with Scriptures quoted to me at every possible moment. They became ingrained in my heart and mind.

At the age of 14 I accepted Christ for myself, after having previously accepted Him for the sake of my parents and grandmother. I got involved with church youth activities. My socializing was limited primarily to religious functions. Although I was sheltered, I was very happy. I always felt loved and secure.

College brought surprises that threatened my sense of security. I was appalled and frightened by the excessive use of stimulants and rampant promiscuity. How could people be so sinful? I would never do that. The thought of it was so disgusting!

In time, I became more flexible. Although I still hated alcohol (and anything that could poison the body) I became more understanding and accepting of people who indulged.

Then I met the love of my life. I let down all of my defenses with him. I still don't know why. He was a friend, a confidant and a lover. I trusted him, felt safe with him, and told him all my problems. We were inseparable, yet I never felt smothered.

Our strong bond challenged other aspects of my life. My friends waned away. To be my friend, they had to be his friend, which wasn't easy for many. Perhaps this was due to an increasingly obvious quality in him which made even

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me uneasy. "He's a weak person," I'd say to rationalize his odd behavior and sporadic bouts of deceitful calculation. "He just can't cope with pressure."

The time we first made love I cried because I felt guilty for not feeling guilty. I loved him, and making love felt so right. I wondered why God would make something that felt right be wrong. Although I prayed, I continued sleeping with him.

I go pregnant at 20. I can hardly believe these words apply to me. I had used birth control pills but experienced many problems. I broke out in a rash and stopped taking them mid-pack. Previous scares had left me pretty cocky about not getting pregnant. I could recall several "unprotected" instances, and nothing had ever happened. I kept looking for my period to come on any day. After three weeks I began to get nervous. A pregnancy test confirmed my greatest fear. I remember involuntarily half-smiling when I first heard the news. In that moment I experienced joy and awe at being able to conceive. Seconds later, reality set in. I collapsed into my fiancé's arms in uncontrollable tears.

I chose to have an abortion because, the way I saw it, I had no other choice. I knew that I was not ready for a child, emotionally or financially. I also knew news of my pregnancy would kill my parents. Other family members had dropped similar bombshells. I couldn't bear the thought of hurting them more.

Prior to my personal choice I had no opinion on abortion. The debate over whether a fetus was a human being left me cold. Despite the pain I've suffered I still believe that people should be able to make their own choices, whatever the consequences. And there are many consequences. Anyone who says there aren't is lying. Along with the relief comes the guilt, particularly for a church-raised woman.

The abortion process was uncomplicated. My fiancé accompanied me to the women's clinic. I was a panicky, diarrhetic mess. I begged to be put to sleep. As in lovemaking, I blocked out images of my parents and grandmother. Within 15 minutes the whole process was over.

Back home, I was nursed and coddled by my fiancé. He said he understood, held me as I cried, and bought aspirin for my cramps. Weeks later the abortion was still a secret, and I was composed. No one knew what I had gone through.

I told myself I'd be OK because my fiancé would always

be with me. We had planned to be married that year. Together, we'd deal with the horrible secret and share the unbearable pain.

But our relationship began to deteriorate. My fiancé's understanding became accusation as he claimed he had really wanted the baby. He turned out to be a con man. For three years I had thought I knew him, and I hadn't known him at all. He was a thief, a liar and a woman beater. Funny I hadn't seen any of these traits.

I came out of this experience less trusting and naive. I was humbled by the fact that I had done what I once said I would never do. I was now on the level of those I had condemned. I no longer felt superior, only acutely aware of the weakness of the flesh.

For two years I carried the abortion in my heart. I didn't long for or wonder about the "would be" child. Despite the guilt, I felt that "all things had worked together for good." There had been no indecision. I felt that God helped me through this ordeal despite His disapproval. But I continued to punish myself. My relationships with loved ones suffered because I felt guilty for not sharing this secret.

The devil told me that I could never be redeemed. Feeble attempts at prayer were thwarted by this. Finally, I fell down weeping and heard God tell me to "go and sin no more." I knew that I was forgiven and had been for quite some time. Forgiving myself proved to be a much greater task. In time, God sent a special friend to help heal me. We learned to trust each other. Though we leaned on one another, the core of our friendship was our common love of Christ.

One day my new friend asked me to share my burden. Tearfully and reluctantly, I told him what happened three years ago. He held me and rocked me and told me that God loved me. He said, "When will you let this go? When will you forgive yourself? Release this and let God work through you."

Since that day, my life has been enriched by my humble understanding and acceptance of others. I seldom judge, but try to understand the motive behind actions. I no longer exempt Christians from falling short of the glory of God. I try to live as purely and as honestly as possible. Always my abortion stands out as my greatest mistake. I look back with sincere thanks that I made it through. I still don't understand why God gave me this experience, but I believe I emerged as a stronger person who will never take God or His grace for granted. ■



"Single women get labels all the time: old maid, lesbian, flirt. It doesn't matter what we do."

## Single

I was anti-church from when I was young. When I was in the third grade my parents decided I had to go to the Mennonite school. I reacted against that and became a rebellious student. I didn't want to be known as a Mennonite. In those times, many of the Mennonite girls still wore coverings. I refused to become a member of the church. Everyone got so distressed that every time we'd have special meetings they'd always make sure that the evangelist came to our farm to play baseball so he would get in good with me and maybe talk to me. We'd go to Brunk meetings, and Mom and my aunt would be crying and Dad would lean over and say, "Don't you want to go up this year?" and I would say "No, I'm really not interested." I didn't even pretend I was a Christian.

What kept me interested in the church were two single sisters who were about six years older than I. They accepted me without trying to convert me, and I think it was through them that I had any inkling that Christianity or the Mennonite church was OK.

After graduation I decided I was going to make a public confession of faith at the spring meetings. I waited until the last night: I still was holding out. I often look back at my rebellious nature and wonder if that isn't why I struggle with authority within the church today.

I went off to a Mennonite college, and started a new self-image away from home. When I began studying the history of Anabaptism I said, "Wait a minute. There's nothing about this that I should be embarrassed about." I embraced Anabaptism and the Mennonite church and Christianity.

After college I went back to teach in the conference in which I was raised. I had hated their ethnocentricity. Their conference was all the world they knew. There's a certain elitism about that, and my goal was to somehow help at least a few students break out of that mold and see the world. I bought a station wagon and took students on service trips over breaks.

Then I went to a Mennonite college to teach. During that time the charismatic movement was just beginning. Because

of my willingness to grow spiritually, I was attracted to those groups although I didn't like the emotionalism. I was part of a student group and gave leadership to it because I was the only faculty person in it. I had been affirmed by people that I had the gift of leadership. But when someone at another Mennonite institution heard that I as a woman was leading the group, they quick sent a man out to take me aside and tell me that this was inappropriate. They took me to a meeting to show me how women in charismatic groups were supposed to act. That was about 15 years ago. That ended that charismatic phase for me.

At that time I was involved in a large congregation. I would go to church and have a worshipful experience, but I'd walk away feeling "What was there for me today? It was so family oriented." Afterwards, everybody was oohing and aching over babies and talking about getting together later. I realized I'm sort of an oddball. The church doesn't accept people unless they look and act a certain way. I was about 30. Fortunately there were a number of us single people in that age group because we were teaching at the college. We felt one of the most frustrating things about singleness is that on Sunday, when everyone else goes home to a family, we go home to an empty house. We decided to meet on Sunday afternoons and then have a fellowship supper together.

Next I moved into overseas work. My experience there was that I just visited churches or didn't go to church at all. So when I came back, I felt a great need to become involved and to use what I felt were strong gifts in administration and leadership.

The opportunity came to become involved in a small church where they needed leadership. I was asked to teach Sunday school, be a Sunday school superintendant, and serve as an elder. They needed a director for their day camp, and they begged and begged me to take the job. I had barely said yes, hardly gotten the "s" out, before some woman said, "Oh, but it's just so sad we don't have a man to do this." That was the attitude all the time: They asked me to do something, I did it and then they said, "But we ought to have a man." Some people thought my taking leadership was OK, but there were others—young, educated people—who were against it, and that just destroyed me.

I was living with another single woman at the time. The church didn't know how to handle that. First of all, they don't know how to handle single people after a certain age. They don't know what Sunday school class they should be in or whether to invite them to a party. But all of a sudden there were two of us. Now what do they do with these two



"When I don't live with someone I become terribly selfish. I get frustrated when someone wastes my time or interrupts what I'm doing. I think, 'Just get out of here as soon as possible so I can get on with what I'm doing.' So I don't particularly like who I am when I live alone."



single women? Do they treat us like a couple? Do they ask both of us to come to their house, or only invite one of us at a time?

The pastoral couple were sensitive to my need to be an individual. I don't know anyone in that church who was what I would call a normal Mennonite. They asked us, "How would you like us to handle this?" I said that sometimes we'd enjoy coming together, and there are times we'd like to be individuals. But most people just saw us as a couple—if you ask the one you ask the other. For four years I was intensely involved with that church and felt a lot of support but I was tired of hearing a few say, "It's too bad there's no man."

Then I took a job with a Mennonite agency and realized I could use my administrative and leadership skills at a church-related job. I didn't have to get bent out of shape about whether or not I can use them on Sunday morning.

One snowy morning I visited a local Mennonite church. I got there early and waited around until someone came. He gave me a bulletin, and I opened it and saw the sermon was on how to make your marriage better. I flew into a rage. I said, "On Sunday morning they have the audacity to have such a topic when it's supposed to be an inclusive experience! How can I sit through such a service?" I gave my bulletin back to the man and said, "If you don't mind, I'm going to come back another Sunday. As a single person, I question whether my needs will be met today."

I arrived late at another Mennonite church and found the sermon was on children. I decided then to visit churches and really listen to what the sermons said. For about a month straight, every sermon I heard dealt with or used symbols of marriage and family. When I read the bulletin, everything dealt with family needs. Not having a family, not even living with another single person to give me a sense of family, I wondered what there was for me. Is the church the place for singles? I can go there and worship. But don't ask me to go to fellowship meals or retreats or even to that dumb fellowship tea between the sermon and Sunday school: I hate it. I hate working through coffee hour with a passion. And it is work.

I think church is planned by and planned for the outgoing extrovert types. They are the ones who serve on the committees, so they plan their kinds of things. They started this idea that church should be where you do fellowship. Even with my personality, which is outgoing, my worship needs to be different from what I do at my job. I'm a more reflective person on the morning that I worship.

Chitchat meets a need for some people. Some people develop those skills. But I'm a single person who lives alone and works with people. When I'm at work, I talk about work. I don't have time to chat. When I go home, I spend most of my time not speaking to anyone. It is all processing. People laugh at me in the morning: My voice is a whisper. I say, "I haven't talked to anyone since 5 p.m. yesterday. What do you expect my voice to sound like?"

I have found one church that, apart from the fellowship problem, is a beautiful worship experience. It meets my needs as long as I can just go to worship and not have to build relationships. At first, I wanted to get to know new people but I didn't know how to do that. I thought surely people would invite me to their house for a meal, and then I'd get to know them. (I guess I could have invited them to my house, but just as a practical consideration, it's easier and less expensive for a family to prepare for one more than it is for a single person to provide for a family.) I was never invited to anybody's house except by other colleagues who attended that church.

I thought, maybe I'm just being hard on people. Then along comes a couple I work with and they tell me, "Wow, the first Sunday we went to that church, we got invited to someone's home." I said, "Wait a minute here. Why? How?" I went off on my tirade. I said, "That's just because you're a couple!" And the woman said, "I agree, because I was single for a long time. I've gotten invited out after church more in the short time I'm married than I did for all the years I was single."

I asked some married people, "How did you get so involved?" They said, "We had children in the nursery, and we got to know other parents." Then a single woman said she also volunteered in the nursery to get to know the parents. I'm not willing to do that. You can't tell me that the only way I can become known in this church is to get to know the kids.

I'm resigned to church not being a whole experience for me. A single person is a minority in the church, and let's admit it: We live in a world where everything is done for majorities, and that means families. I just have to see where I fit in.

Our minister's sermons are inclusive, and there is lots of room for women in leadership if I would want it. But I'm comfortable with just going for the worship experience and the singing. In that sense I go for community because you can't sing harmony alone. But I'm not part of a small group. As I've gotten older, I need group things less.

**"The church doesn't know how to handle single people after a certain age. They don't know what Sunday school class they should be in or whether to invite them to a party."**

**"I would prefer to be in a covenant relationship with a person with whom there is mutual give-and-receive and a lifelong commitment to working at that relationship. I don't know of many marriages like that."**

I have no illusions that I will change the church. I support our minister, but he's not going to change it either. He talks these nice sentences. In his first sermon he said, "I want you to know that as long as I'm pastor here, you have the freedom to doubt and struggle." (If a female would have made a statement like that she would have been fired, but that's all right.) He can try, but he can't change it either.

People think I'm a social freak. I knew already when I was 13 or 14 that I was not the certain kind of female who was attracted to men or attractive to men. While my friends were flirting with guys, I was competing with them. They were my buddies. I was equal with them in almost every way except physical strength. Then when I was 30, I panicked. I went on a diet and cut my hair. I put on a whole new life. I tried. I decided I was interested in men after all. But you know what I did? I got up on the roof and helped the man put shingles on his parents' house. I do not have the graces to know how to go get a man. I had three dates in my life. I surely knew I was going to be single.

I would prefer to be in a covenant relationship with a person with whom there is mutual give-and-receive and a lifelong commitment to working at that relationship. I don't know of many marriages like that. That's probably another reason why I'm single: I have this idea of what that kind of relationship should be, and it might be so ideal that it could never happen.

When I don't live with someone and don't have to work at relationships, I become terribly selfish. I get frustrated when someone wastes my time or interrupts what I'm doing. I think, "Just get out of here as soon as possible so I can get on with what I want to do." But when I live with someone I learn to give and take in those areas. So I don't particularly like who I am when I live alone. Sometimes I think I should just force myself to take in any roommate. But in spite of how gregarious I am, I'm very guarded. I don't trust men. From my three dates I'd say they're only out for one thing. But I don't trust women either. I may not want to be married, but I long to tell one person what I think and feel. I tried doing that in a church context. People can't handle it. Then they treat you like something else. They say, "You can't be a Christian."

Another frustration is that families in the church spend a lot of time talking about security, whether it's through owning a home, living in a certain area, or planning for their children's education. But any time I talk about security, I feel like the response is, "You don't really need that. There's only one of you." When I consider making a

major purchase, it always seems too materialistic. (I may put that on myself.) There's no security in my present job. I know all my skills are used, and I can develop new ones. But I have no assurance that I can continue to do this job. Over 40 that's a little scary. I've begun to want to dig in and feel some roots. I've never stayed in one place more than five years. Why do I have to be transient? Why do I have to be ready to move on when the church calls just because I'm single?

Finally, the church doesn't know what to do with single people in intimate relationships. Church people become uncomfortable, and then they become judgmental. When a single person is involved in an intimate relationship, people throw the next loop over them and say, "They're not just single, they're sinful." I'm an affectionate person, and as a single person it doesn't matter to whom I relate—another single woman, a married man, or even a single man. It's always judged and labeled. Single women get labels all the time: old maid, lesbian, flirt. It doesn't matter what we do. I wonder if I have to live alone all my life just so I don't make people uncomfortable.

So for myself, I embrace the wild. I go hug trees and try to become one with the wilderness. I have tried to leave the church thinking that may be the only answer. But I believe that God wants all His people working in community rather than functioning as isolated individuals. I think we should work at making singles feel included and respected during worship rather than excluded and odd. We need to look for ways to meet a single person's needs for caring, honest, deep relationships, although you can't program a class for that. We also need to refrain from labels. And for persons who do need the church for fellowship, we have a responsibility to reach out and invite single people to join us. ■

## Hurt

I've been divorced for nine and a half years. My ex-husband was raised in a very strict Mennonite community (the horse-and-buggy type). He was almost like an Amish fellow until he was 21 when he came to Portland in the 1-W service in 1955.

I was at the University of Oregon working as a summer student nurse when I met Sam. He was working at the



"I was supposed to be a brand new happily married woman, and did not understand my feelings as depression."



"Lack of birth control options has been a major factor in my decision to have children."

hospital as part of his 1-W service. I was enthralled with meeting a young man from such a fine, upstanding background. Perhaps one of my reasons for being so attracted to him was his seeming total honesty and total commitment to a serious Christian upbringing. I had been raised in a fundamentalist Methodist home. While I was not a very strict religious person, I did have some strong moral values. I felt that Sam and I were going to have a very traditional Christian home.

I was 19 when I met him, and 20 when we were married. We had planned to get married when I graduated from college in two years, but the January of my junior year I found out that I was pregnant. I had known Sam for six months. While we got along fairly well, I was beginning to see some problems just before I discovered this pregnancy. I felt that he did not have any idea of what he wanted to be when he grew up or got through 1-W service. My uttering some concerns about our future and career plans seemed to upset him greatly.

He told me from the beginning that my concern for this was not to be because, after all, I was only a woman. That was the beginning of my feeling that something was not quite right with this relationship. When I discovered about two weeks later that I was pregnant, we made a quick decision to get married (in those days there were not too many alternatives), with of course my parents' prompting.

They thought he was the most wonderful thing that had ever come along in our family, so they encouraged our relationship. Later, as problems developed in our marriage, my parents frequently implied that I had done something wrong and that he couldn't be at fault. I believe they saw him the same way I had: the perfect person from the East; this fine, upstanding, Christian young man who could do nothing wrong.

This sounds like a negative aspect of my parents, but I understand where they were coming from. They were very fond of him and felt that since he had this strong upbringing, somehow he had to be right, and I wrong. They were from a structured background in Kansas where the man was still the head of the household, and the woman was a much lesser person. Even the fact that I had wanted to go to college was a surprise to my father who felt I was going to get married right out of high school, and that would be as far as any woman should go.

So I was raised by a chauvinistic father, and I married a man who had strong views about the man being the head of the household and the woman taking a lesser position.

I was depressed about being pregnant and also quite ill. I lost 30 pounds my first three months. I was trying to finish school and maintain a little household. I missed my friends in the dormitory. I didn't have any peer support any more. I realize now that I was going through quite a bit of grief and didn't even know that I was grieving. I was supposed to be a brand new happily married woman and did not understand my feelings as depression. I think now that the nausea and loss of weight were an emotional reaction to what was happening to me.

I had been working in the pediatric unit and seeing quite deformed babies while I was pregnant, and I was afraid that my child would be deformed because I had been so ill. But she was essentially healthy.

My mother helped out by taking care of her while I went to school. Mother made me feel quite guilty. We would pick up the baby on the weekends and holidays and bring her home with us. I felt my daughter seemed angry at me, even at 3 months of age.

I found myself pregnant again before I was through school. Heather had been born in September of 1960. Iris was born in April of '62. I finally officially graduated in June of '62.

We were economically quite strapped in those times. Sam had gotten a job selling insurance. Sometimes he did well and other times not so well. It was trying for him because we could not plan on any income. I was finishing my public health experience at the time and found that there was a section of housing developments in the area that was set aside for medical students. We moved into the housing project and lived there until I finished school. I remember my parents were quite upset about our move to the housing project. Nevertheless, it became a haven for us.

The rules of the housing project required us to leave within three months of my graduation. It was never much of a question that I would go to work after the second child because Sam made that pretty clear. One night we had a go 'round when I indicated that I would like to stay home at least a year with our second child. He said he had worked hard to put me through college, and I was going to pay him back. One of the ways I would pay him back was to go to work. I suppose my guilt was so great that I felt that this was an appropriate thing to do. I didn't even question it much. I think I cried for about an hour one night, then decided that, by golly, I had worked hard at my career, and I was going to be the best nurse I could possibly be.

Sam had a younger sister that needed to get away from the

"He accused me of not wanting to touch the baby or be with her when she cried at night. I remember crawling to her crib to hold her because he wouldn't get out of bed."



#### \* Opportunities

- \* Mennonite Conciliation Services has an expressed commitment to involving more women in its network and ministry. An opportunity for women in the Harrisonburg, Va. area to learn more about mediation and mediation skills will take place on Saturday, March 21 when the Shenandoah District Church of the Brethren Peace Committee will sponsor a day-long

restrictive environment at home, so Sam asked her to come to Portland to help us care for our children while I worked. She lived with us for about a year until she married one of Sam's former roommates who was a Mennonite boy from their home state. This seemed just fine with her.

We were able to finally buy a home after three or four years of renting. When I was at work and Sam was in charge of the two kids, I would come home and feel like I had three children. The house would be a total disaster. He was always playing with them, which was great, but he never used any discipline. If they fixed meals, they just threw the pots and pans around. I was to clean up afterwards. They all had a wonderful time. They were so pleased with their Daddy, but I just felt like I was the mother of three children instead of two.

I was beginning to feel like maybe this marriage was not in my own best interests. At the same time I felt strongly committed to the marriage vows. I thought, "Maybe if I were happier in my career I'd be happier in my marriage." I had always had a dream of getting a master's degree. But at the same time, Sam was saying he would like to have a son or, as I see it now, "another little boy to play with."

I was torn because the girls were about 5 and 6, and I said, "Things have been kind of rough, and if we're going to have another child, we should probably have a better understanding of each other." He did not want to see a counselor or get any help. He thought our problems were all in my head. So I went down to the school of nursing to talk about getting my master's degree. They said, "You had a 2.6 when you graduated from here, and that's not real good for getting into a master's program." However, since I had done very well on the state boards in psychiatric nursing they said, "If you take a statistics course at night and do well, we might consider you for the program."

I decided to take the statistics course. It was very difficult. I was so sure I had failed the final exam I didn't go back and see what I had made. I thought it was a sign from God that I was indeed to have the son that Sam wanted and thereby save my marriage. Also, Sam had had only an eighth-grade education, and I felt that if I got more education it would put one more stress on our marriage, and I should not do that.

I became pregnant with our third child who luckily turned out to be a boy. Rick was born in October of 1967. I ran into some complications at delivery and was unconscious following his birth. I thought I was going to die. I could hear everything going on around me. My doctor was

staying with me all the time, but I knew that Sam was not in the room. Later on, I found out that he was out buying cigars and calling to tell people that he had a son. The idea that I might be hurt because he didn't stay with me was never spoken, nor did he ever apologize. But it's something that has stayed with me to this day.

During the next few years, my unhappiness was expressed by swallowing everything that happened to me and maintaining a very happy face for the world. I was Superwoman, working a full-time job and raising my children. I was also swallowing too much food and beginning to gain a great deal of weight. Sam told me that I was getting way too fat for him and I had to do something about it. Just the way he put it made me think for the first time that he might even divorce me if I got too fat. So I went to Weight Watchers, and over two years lost 65 pounds.

He was quite pleased and was actually nice to me during that time. Of course I still worked, and he still took my paychecks, and I still didn't have much money for myself. But we were able to buy a second home. The children all seemed pretty happy. Between 1970 and '73, we probably had the best years of our lives. I lost the weight. Sam was so pleased with me.

Then I ran into some problems with birth control. I could no longer take the pill. I expelled the IUD. One evening Sam was out of condoms, I had only a little bit of foam. He wanted me to go out and buy the condoms. I was so furious, I just would not do that. He insisted on having sex. I used what little foam I had and of course became pregnant with our fourth child.

I was 36 years old, and was devastated that I was pregnant. By this time abortion was legal, and some people thought I should do that. I felt that it was all right for other women but something I personally could not do. I said, "This is God's way of testing me, and I will survive this too."

I was definitely going to have that child, but I also made a strong decision that I would have no more. Since all the birth control methods no longer were working for me, I would have a tubal ligation. Sam and I had spoken about him having a vasectomy earlier, and he had said the usual things: "No, that makes a man lazy and impotent." He was afraid to do that. But when Rose was born and I had signed the papers for the tubal ligation to be done immediately, he then said, "No, no, no, don't do that. I will have a vasectomy."

introductory workshop on conflict resolution. Nancy Sider, coordinator of the Virginia Chapter of MCS and a practicing mediator, will be one of the key presenters/trainers at the workshop, to be held at Bridgewater (Va.) College. To register or obtain more information, contact Nancy at (703) 433-2771 or Larry Glick at (703) 879-2515.

*New Society Publishers*, a publishing house committed to fundamental social change through nonviolent action, is looking for three new members to start in March 1987. The requirements include an activist background, a two-year commitment, and a desire to learn. For a complete job description write to New Society Publishers, 4722 Baltimore Avenue Philadelphia, Pa. 19143.

*"Women of Color: Global Identities and Strategies for Economic Self-Sufficiency"* is the theme of the next national conference of the National Institute for Women of Color, scheduled for March 5-7, 1987. The conference will take place at the Americana Host Inn, Harrisburg, Pa. More information is available from the NIWC office at P.O. Box 50583, Washington, D.C. 20004-0583; phone (202) 828-0735.

The 1987 Association for Women in Development conference will be held April 15-17 in Manhattan, Kan. The theme is "Moving Forward: Innovations in Development Policy, Action, and Research." For more information contact: Conference Office, Division of Continuing Education, 1623 Anderson Avenue, Manhattan, Kan. 66502 (913) 532-5575.

I said, "No, this is something you really don't want to do, and I'm afraid it would really be harmful to you in the long run. I'm the one who's been having the children, and I'm the one who will have children in the future if anything should go wrong, and I personally want to make sure I can have no more children." So I had the tubal ligation. This may have been the turning point in our marriage. I know he was very upset about it.

I developed a blood clot following that surgery and was in a lot of pain. He accused me of not wanting to touch the baby or be with her when she cried at night. I couldn't get up and feed her, and he refused to. I remember crawling to her crib to hold her because he wouldn't get out of bed.

Sam was treating me very poorly. He had been a fireman since shortly after Rick was born. He was gone for 24 hours a day, and I was alone with the children. So we were drifting apart. He worked with a group of men who seemed to take great pleasure in putting down their wives. They used to play a little game in which they would call their wives with the other guys listening in. They would talk very angrily or mean and time themselves to see how long it would take to get their wives to cry. Sam told me about this years later. I mean he was doing it to me. It never took me long to cry. Apparently he won his bets.

I'm realizing how angry and bitter I am, and poor Sam has no way of rebuttal. But it's been nine and a half years since we were divorced, and I guess the pain and the memories are still quite great.

My children have grown up to be the most wonderful people any mother could want. My oldest daughter did experience some psychological problems and was in a mental center for about three months recently, but she is now going to school and working part time. The second daughter, who got into drugs and ran away at age 14 when Sam and I were divorced, earned her GED and married at 18 an upstanding, fundamentalist Pentecostal man. She went on to college, graduated with honors and is now a project manager for a space corporation. I'm extremely proud of her. My son got a college football scholarship and is a good student as well as a good athlete. My youngest daughter is a talented young lady and a shining star who keeps me laughing.

I had been baptized in the Covenant Mennonite church after I married Sam, and I have continued my membership there since the divorce. It is difficult to maintain membership in that church because of the memories of sitting there together as a family. Sam no longer attends

Covenant Mennonite. He has remarried and attends a different church. He felt put aside by the church, probably more than I did. Maybe that was because people knew that the divorce was his decision, and I was opposed to it.

Trying to get a new life started is very difficult while attending the same church. But there are also the friendships and the support systems that one does not want to totally do without. There was a church group who had asked Sam and me to join them about 15 years ago. Because of his work, Sam couldn't go all the time, so he didn't want to go at all. After we were divorced, this group of 14 lovely people invited me to join them. This has become the most support I could imagine. While they never did bad-mouth Sam, I've felt they have been in my corner all along. I don't know how I would have gotten through the past few years without them.

The only thing has been that—they did not ever mean to do this but—invariably somebody would say, "Oh, I saw Sam," or "Have you heard from Sam?" Now it's been nine years, people, and this is still going on. So when I developed a new relationship with another man and later married him, I decided that this group and I were going to have to part company, at least in terms of the every-other-week meetings. However, we're still good friends, and occasionally I go on retreats with them.

While I wouldn't consider myself a strong religious person in terms of quoting the Bible or reading it frequently, I do have a strong faith in a personal relationship with the Lord. The fact that the children have turned out so well has got to be in God's hands, because I don't think that I was a tremendous parent. I gave them lots of love and encouragement and told them to be responsible for their own behavior. I occasionally did a little screaming, yelling, running after them and losing my temper. Most of the time I just prayed, "Lord, help my kids get through this. Help them become the kind of persons that they will themselves be proud of, as well as making them good citizens of the world." I feel like that has almost been achieved. I still have the fourth one to watch, but it seems like she's heading in the right direction. I just hope that the Lord will stick with me until she's raised.

As I evaluate my experience, I think I had no business having four children. Only one was planned. I certainly did not have good enough information about birth control the first go 'round, and it was still in the planning stages in the second. By the fourth, it wasn't working. So lack of birth control options has been a major factor in my decision to have children.

• **Women in Leadership**

- **Joan Barkman** became MCC Canada's voluntary service director on Jan. 2. A member of Aberdeen Evangelical Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, she previously served as voluntary service coordinator with MCC Manitoba.
- **Doris Litwiller** is the first winner of the W.T. Townshend Award, presented to an outstanding elementary

teacher in the Waterloo, Ontario area. A member of the Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church in Kitchener, Doris has been teaching for 35 years.

**Marlene Kropf** has been appointed Spiritual Formation Program Assistant at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries, Elkhart, Ind. She succeeds **Thelma Miller Groff** who retired recently from the seminary. Her work includes

retreat leading, teaching, and one-to-one spiritual guidance to students. Marlene continues to work half-time for the Mennonite Board of Congregational Ministries in congregational education.

• **Gladys Penner** has been appointed interim editor of the Winnipeg-based **EMMC Recorder**, a publication of the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference.

- **Gerda Krause** and **Helen Dick** have been elected to the board of directors of Columbia Bible College in Clearbrook, British Columbia. Gerda is a college instructor and Helen is a nurse and homemaker.

I think the church helped me with parenting skills. Perhaps they could have been more helpful during the time of the divorce, particularly if some of the men would have taken more interest in my son and spent more time with him. Now that he's become a fairly good football player, more of the guys are interested in spending time with him. But he's essentially all done now. He's grown. I wish somebody would have come along and said, "How 'bout me taking care of the kids and you just go off for a weekend by yourself." That would have been nice. Nobody said during that time, "Is there any way that we can help?" ■



## "Tormented"

I am the third daughter of seven children. We were raised by a father who was very open regarding sexuality and a very shy, quiet mother. We were all told that sex was only designed as a total expression of love in marriage. My father's parents had to get married because my grandmother was six months pregnant. It was a terrible "shame" on the family, so my parents, throughout their dating, tried very hard not to go "too far."

My first date was when I was almost 14. I dated a lot, but met my future husband and started dating him when I was 14 1/2. We dated regularly for the following three years. He had spent one of those years away from me in college but we still remained faithful to each other. We had not made love. He dropped out of school during his second year and moved to Texas. He had grown tired of our relationship and needed to move on.

I was absolutely crushed and would not give up. But after a visit to Texas to see him, I realized that his feelings were not the same as mine. So I went back home and began to date again. No one ever seemed to compare, but I kept trying.

He came home to visit his parents about four months later and called me. When he found out that I was dating someone he knew, he became extremely jealous. He was impressed with my new independence. I was out of school and had a good job and my own apartment. We went out and found that love again. After many phone calls between Texas and Indiana, we decided that I would move to Texas. Once before I moved, he flew home for a surprise visit.

That night was the first time that we "went all the way." I was 18.

After moving to Texas, I discovered that I was pregnant. My main goal in life had always been to get married and be a mother. But I really didn't want it this way. I didn't want to "shame" my parents, and neither did he. But I wasn't going to give up my baby.

Fortunately or unfortunately, abortion was legal in Texas. My fiancé's boss, who was also raised Mennonite, suggested abortion. My fiancé's brother seconded it, and they all proceeded to "torment" me with the idea.

I was determined to have the baby, and they continued to tell me how selfish I was being. I finally went to our pastor for counseling, and he encouraged the abortion saying, "God is a loving God, and He will forgive you." I knew God was forgiving, but even when I knew I was taking a life? When I went to the doctor, he told me I only had four days to make a final decision before the three-month legal limit would expire.

I was a mess! I had too many people and emotions pulling me too many directions. My husband-to-be had told me that if I chose to keep the baby, I would be on my own.

I finally had a physical and emotional breakdown and collapsed on the floor of my apartment. When I came to, my roommate and my husband-to-be were there. I told them to schedule the abortion, and I'd sign the papers. I had the abortion in a hospital and was put completely under so I wouldn't "know" what was happening.

I have lived with this horror every day of my life. I debate where we would be today had I kept the baby. Our parents don't know about any of this, and I hope they will never find out. I'll bear the shame instead of them.

We became engaged about six months after the abortion. After we were married, I couldn't wait to have a baby. I had to find out if God had truly forgiven me. Would He punish me by never letting me get pregnant again?

I couldn't get pregnant, and my doctor said it was only because I was punishing myself. When I did get pregnant, I had complications and was confined to bed at four months and was later hospitalized. I finally delivered a fine healthy son, vaginally. All of my physical problems had cleared up.

He was a wonderful handful. He was awake all the time and very colicky. During the night, I would nurse him for

- *Rosalind Andreas* has been elected to the 36-member governing body of Bethel College in North Newton, Kan. She has served as dean of students at the University of Arizona in Tucson since 1985 and has degrees from Bethel, the University of Kansas and the University of Michigan.
- *Emily Weber*, a 1986 graduate of Rockway Mennonite Collegiate in Kitchener, Ontario won a \$1,500 prize for an essay, "Settling International Conflicts Peacefully" in a contest sponsored by Nuclear Age Peace Foundation of Santa Barbara, Calif.
- Free-lance writer *Faith Kuhns*, who recently moved to Fort Collins, Colo., authored a monthly feature for the women's magazine *Boston Woman* while residing in Boston, Mass. She is a niece to well-known writer *Laverna Klippenstein*.
- *Sandra Miller* was named recruitment manager for Mennonite Board of Missions, Elkhart, Ind. in October and will oversee the recruitment of persons for overseas and Voluntary Service assignments. She joined the MBM staff in 1982.

45 minutes and then my husband would walk him to sleep. It was a very tiring time for both of us, and I was thankful that we both had wanted him.

Our second child was an easy pregnancy and delivery. There was very little rivalry between the two children. Three years later, our third child was born. We have decided, due to economics and age spaces, not to have any more children. We will hopefully soon be taking permanent measures to insure that.

I feel that the church was perhaps not what I needed when I was 18. I was so young, and I had such limited advice. But our church is making strides toward what I need. More needs to be done to inform our youth of the consequences they may be facing for momentary pleasure. I am willing to do what I can to make sure what happened to me will never happen to anyone else. I don't know if abortion is right or wrong, but it was wrong for me. It bothers me that the church is not more open with our youth about sex and its consequences. Even Christian parents are only doing a borderline job in talking to our children about these important issues. We can't let the schools handle this matter. The church must tell kids of the turmoil, suffering, and loss someone feels for the child who was given up. Kids must hear this from believable sources.

As a Sunday school teacher, I have thought about making a videotape for distribution in churches, interviewing women who have had abortions, mothers of adopted children and unmarried mothers. I've also considered interviewing men about dealing with the peer pressure to have sex to prove you're a man.

I also feel that the concept of lay counselors is good. We should have people who have been in these situations respond to the needs in the congregation. A pastor cannot be everything to everyone, and we cannot place all our trust in one human. It is the responsibility of everyone in the congregation to support each other. ■

## Overwhelmed

My husband and I decided to have a baby. I only had a need to experience childbirth once. I wanted to know about that part of my body. I got pregnant and within the first three months had a miscarriage. It was very disappointing

but I accepted it as part of the plan of our lives.

I waited another year before trying to get pregnant again. When I did, the overall pregnancy was good. I have very good memories of conceptualizing that whole child inside of me, feeling the pleasure of being pregnant, being enjoyed by others during that pregnancy, seeing my fat tummy and being OK being fat. The actual birth was very difficult. If I would have ever thought about getting pregnant again, I would have had to work through some real anxieties about the intensity of the pain.

We wanted to have more children and had talked about adoption. When she was 2 years old, our enlargement of the family happened. Before she was born, we put interest papers into the adoption agency saying that we were interested in one child under the age of 7. But we got in touch with parents who had adopted, and they talked about their experiences. We saw that we were probably interested in having more than one child and knew that there were loads of kids to be adopted in family groups.

At that time we felt so energetic. We felt like our lives were together. We had come from good Mennonite farm backgrounds and our resources were beyond what we thought we could ever use wisely, so why would we not share part of our lives with others who have less.

Looking through all the adoption books, which are like Sears catalogs, we signed our names to a number of groups. We ended up with three Caucasian kids. If you look at our family picture, you would not know that they are adopted because even their hair and eye color is similar to ours, although that was not a consideration for us.

They came on our doorstep one day at 10, 11, and 12 years of age when Ellicia was 2. In that process, our family went from three to six. We had done a lot of talking with our daughter for as much as she could understand at 2. Now she hardly remembers when she was the only child.

The adopted children's birth parents are alive, and we have had contact with them. We felt it was important for the children to get in touch and know who they were. So both the birth parents, separately, have been here. When we first contacted the birth mother, she had had another child, which was devastating for our three oldest.

We went to an adoption camp where we met many people in similar situations. Our peers did not have teen-agers, so we were going through the teen-age years by ourselves except for those contacts we had. Being team specialist with



• **Women in Pastoral Ministries**

• **Clare Ann Ruth Heffelbower**, a recent graduate of Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in Fresno, Calif., has assumed responsibilities as associate pastor of Eighth Street Mennonite Church in Goshen, Ind.

• **Jan Stutzman** of Greeley, Colo. was appointed youth coordinator for the Rocky Mountain Conference of the

Mennonite Church. She formerly worked in the student services department of Hesston (Kan.) College.

• **Julia Carey** was licensed as a pastoral team member at Community Mennonite Church in Harrisonburg, Va. on Nov. 2.

• **Darryl and Joyce Henson** were installed as pastoral leaders of Bluesky (Alberta) Mennonite Church in September. The couple has been involved in a variety of ministries and training but this is their first pastorate.

• **Marvin and Donnita Payne Hostetler**, recent graduates of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries, were licensed as pastors of First Mennonite Church of Lincoln, Neb. in October.

• **Nancy Kerr** became pastor at Pulaski (Iowa) Church in mid-October. She is a 1986 graduate of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries. She most recently served as a teacher in the Assembly Fellowship, Goshen, Ind., and before beginning seminary studies she pastored the Cincinnati (Ohio) Mennonite Fellowship.

Planned Parenthood, I worked a lot with teen-agers and knew what some of the behaviors were. But when we personally were dealing with it, it was important to get in contact with parents who had kids our children's ages. There are so many times that you feel like you're doing it alone, and what a horrendous problem!

One of the biggest disadvantages with having adopted children is that the bonding needs to happen from conception or certainly early on. Even though there were little tinges of bonding occasionally, I feel like it never did happen. They remember their birth parents. They remember the horrendous times that they had there, the fighting and carrying on. They were put in a foster home and thought they were going to stay there. They got comfortable and then needed to move on. They felt they had no choice. These adults were pushing them around. Some of the kids have talked about feeling like they trust an adult and then get kicked out. So it's been difficult for them to want to get close. Any time that close feeling came, there was a "Wow, I can't do this!" sign that went up. Some of their behavior may have been from those feelings. I see my three oldest children as needing a lot of care and mothering which they never got and often did not allow me to do, and my heart really cries out.

At this time, I am feeling overwhelmed with two of the three involved in pregnancies. The oldest daughter is pregnant for the second time. The first time she had a miscarriage. This time it looks like she will carry the baby through. And just last night my son announced that his girlfriend is due in two months. I feel like I have given them education about birth control, about being sexually responsible, about the horrendous task of being a caretaker of a child, and all that has gone to the wind. So I'm looking at my own identity and saying what kind of a mother am I? Was I? Will I be?

I have a degree in psychology and gerontology. I was in school the whole time since we adopted the older kids. That was my therapy.

My marriage has experienced a lot of stress. Our commitment has always been very great. We have been together in this whole adoption issue. I feel a need to be a two-parent family because child rearing is a very emotionally taxing job, and one person cannot always be on top of it. Often either my husband or I would be under, but the other one was up. At times we would be sitting up in the middle of the night discussing how we were going to deal with a particular problem.

We did some family counseling because early on kids find your vulnerable spots, whether they're birth children or not, and finding your vulnerable spots, they hound them to the end. It was obvious that they were trying to get between my husband and me. The counseling encouraged us to get together to know what the rules were so that the kids couldn't say, "Well Dad said this—I talked to him out in the field," or "Mom said this." We were very consistent and at times really annoyed the kids.

But it was a learning experience. Our son often said, "I don't know why you didn't get some other kids or have some kids of your own to experiment on before you got us." It was like, "You don't know how to be parents to teen-agers." And that was true. I didn't know how to be a parent to teen-agers. I don't know that any parent does. You learn as you grow with your child.

With the birth child, the church was very supportive. We had meals brought in for two weeks—that whole bit of the supportive Mennonite community—which I thoroughly enjoyed. It was a time I could just sit back and enjoy having gone through all that hard work. I was enjoying every birthful minute of life.

With adoption, there wasn't that celebrative feeling. We had each of the kids choose godparents the first year. We helped in that process because we felt it was important for other adults to be involved with them.

We did not adopt the kids until after they were here for about 16 months. We took them in foster care first because their father had not relinquished his rights. The adoption agency took him to court and got him on neglect. We were then able to follow through with the adoption. Our kids were old enough to have a say in court, and we were interested that they said they wanted to be adopted. They didn't understand why we wanted to adopt since being foster kids was fine.

I like this story because it shows the humor that they needed to bring to their lives to deal with some of their stress: In court, the family goes in and then the parents leave, and the kids get to say what they want. We were standing out in the hall waiting for them and when they came out, the two girls came toward my husband and me and our son went the other direction. They said, "Ronald said 'No.'" When he was asked if he wanted to be adopted, he said, "No." At that point we thought, "What do we say?" Here they burst out laughing. It was a joke.

The oldest has finished school, but she's pregnant. The



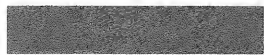
- Sue Steiner has accepted the call of St. Jacobs Mennonite Church to serve as associate pastor beginning this spring. She currently serves as interim chaplain at Conrad Grebel College in Waterloo, Ontario.
- Ann Weber Becker will become co-pastor of the church she attended as a child, First Mennonite Church of Kitchener, Ontario, after graduating from Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries this summer. Her primary responsibility will be as youth minister.
- The 75th anniversary of the installation of the first Dutch Mennonite woman pastor was commemorated with a long article in the Nov. 1, 1986 issue of *Algemeen Doopsgezind Weekblad*, official Dutch Mennonite periodical. When 24-year-old Annie Zernike assumed the pastorate of the Dutch Mennonite Church at Bovenknijpe on Nov. 5, 1911, she became the first woman in that capacity, not only among the Dutch Mennonites but in the nation.
- Edna Peters recently began duties as coordinator of pastoral ministries at Peace Mennonite Church in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

father is not real interested in being her partner. I have a lot of feelings about teen-agers being pregnant and how difficult it is to be a parent and how important it is that kids have the best chance that they can. I'm not sure that my kids are capable of giving them that at this time.

The son chose to quit school in 11th grade and live with some other people. In the last year he has been in five different homes. Now he has his 16-year-old girlfriend pregnant. He is 18, so he is legally responsible for himself. The 17-year-old girl decided not to go back to school this year. She is living with her boyfriend and basically watching TV and sleeping, which has broken my heart.

The 9-year-old is doing lots of things that my husband and I feel good about. But I also know that in her teen-age years, there may be a lot of stuff she needs to work out that's really uncomfortable. She may also be pregnant at whatever age. But all I can do as a parent is continue to plug away at the things that I think are important. I reach out as much as I can, given the energy and whatever the kids allow me to do.

Beyond that, I feel like their future is in their hands. But I think the adopted kids do not realize that they have the world at their fingertips. I think that they're still angry and wishing they wouldn't be where they are. But they aren't ready to say, "This is where I am, and I'm going to accept it even though I don't like it. I'm going to make something out of myself so that I have something to say about who I am and what I do." ■



## Letters

- Thank you for your *Women's Concerns Report* (#67 Women, Choice and Lifestyle).

As brought out in this issue, "Who will take care of the children?" is a serious problem, especially for young families. I have often wondered why many churches are not put to better use. There is much unused space in untaxed buildings, often with rooms and outside space suitable for child care. It just goes to waste in some churches, between Sundays. Why not get VS workers to come and organize day-care services? There is a crying need in most cities, and service-minded people could use their maternal/paternal qualities, and churches would not stand empty five days a week.

Another suggestion is, what about grandmothers and aunts of children whose parents must work? I love to babysit my grandchildren. I might soon be getting too old as I have 77 years behind me. But I feel I must assist my children who must both work. I only do it two days a week, giving me time for myself. My husband helps too.

I remember Mrs. Henry Deckert, during the years my husband served the Bethlehem Mennonite Church, 15 miles north of Bloomfield, Mont. Mrs. Deckert took in her four grandchildren after their mother died since their father had multiple sclerosis. Mrs. Deckert also took care of her son during his long illness. I still have the quilt she gave me made of patches cut from worn-out men's suits and pants, with feather stitching around each five-inch square. George served this church from 1943 to 1955, and the last five of our eight children were born there. Mrs. Henry Deckert was an unsung heroine.

George now serves the Summerfield Mennonite Church on a part-time basis. We rent six apartments to lower-income families. It does not always make money, but we feel we are serving here too.

—Helene Dick, Bloomington, Ill.

- I have been receiving *Report* for a couple years and have really appreciated most of the issues.

I especially enjoyed the most recent issue (#67 Women, Choice and Lifestyle), perhaps because it is the most recent and therefore freshest in my mind, but partly because I am a full-time homemaker with two children and a husband whose occupation is quite time- and energy-consuming. I struggle at times with being a full-time mother/homemaker, but I generally feel good that I am where I should be at the present. Thank you for such a fine publication.

—Susan Nelson, Goshen Ind.

- Thank you for the last two issues (#66 Divorce and The Church and #67 Women, Choice and Lifestyle) of the *Report*. As a divorced woman, single mother, full-time professional and beginning seminary student, these two issues have focused on my present situation and helped me see some direction and affirmation in the choices I'm making.

I just wanted to ensure continuation in receiving the *Report* by informing you of my change of address.

—Louise Dueck, West Hill, Ontario

- The Committee on Women's Concerns is looking for a replacement for Arlene Miller of Elizabethtown, Pa., who has served on the committee for four years. The position is open to a woman from the United States who belongs to the Brethren in Christ church or to any of the smaller Mennonite conferences, such as the Evangelical Mennonite, Conservative Mennonite or

Beachy Amish Mennonite. For more information or to express interest, contact Emily Will, MCC, Box M, Akron, Pa. 17501.



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## News and Verbs

- Joyce Shutt has been organizing annual International Gift Festivals to sell SELFHELP Crafts in Fairfield, Pa. for the past 25 years. From approximately \$500 in sales in 1961, the 1986 festival brought in \$62,000, a record for any one-time SELFHELP sale in the United States, including statewide relief sales. Joyce is the pastor of Fairfield Mennonite Church.
- When 350 delegates from Canada and the United States met in Fresno in October for a Mennonite Brethren Study Conference, a task force of four men and three women also met to discuss the role and ministry of women in the Mennonite Brethren church. The group recommended that further study and teaching is necessary, and are considering putting together a book and study guide.

*REPORT* is published bimonthly by the MCC Committee on Women's Concerns. The committee, formed in 1973, believes that Jesus Christ teaches equality of all persons. By sharing information and ideas, the committee strives to promote new relationships and corresponding supporting structures in which men and women can grow toward wholeness and mutuality. Articles and views presented in *Report* do not necessarily reflect official positions of the Committee

on Women's Concerns.

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- The Rocky Mountain Region of the United Methodist Church adopted a new policy prohibiting ministry candidates from referring to God as exclusively male in church paperwork and interviews. The policy would allow the "historical" Jesus to be called He, but prohibit any exclusively male reference to a divine or messianic Jesus. Such phrases as Divine Light would be used in place of Father, King or Lord. The intent of the requirement was to sensitize candidates to the power of language. In the wake of protests about the new rule, however, the ministry board is reconsidering its decision.
- The Central District Conference of Women in Mission has started a fund to help farm women with basic needs such as job retraining and child care. For more information write Women in Farm Crisis Fund, c/o Susan Weidner, 150 S. Mound St., Bluffton, Ohio 45817.
- Julia Leatherman, director of the maternal and child health division for the Elkhart (Ind.) County Health Department, has received the first Gwendolyn B. Rossell Memorial Award for her instrumental work in promoting maternal and child health issues in Indiana. Julia is a member of the Sunnyside Mennonite Church, Dunlap.
- Cindy Sprunger has served as minority staff director for the Asian and Pacific Affairs Subcommittee of the U.S. House of Representatives in Washington, D.C. for the past 11 years. She grew up in Taiwan with her General Conference missionary parents Hugh and Janet Sprunger, who now serve in Hong Kong.



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